

Sixth Century

STESICHORUS

The Funeral Games for Pelias

178 Hermes gave Castor the steeds
Phlogeos and Harpagus, the swift foals of Podarga,
and Hera gave Xanthus and Cyllarus.

179a (*Gifts for a girl*)
sesame-cakes and spelt, sweetflan and other bakes
and yellow honey.

179b Amphiaraus won the long jump,
Meleager the javelin.

*The Song of Geryon**

S 14 [None of the gods] remained by Zeus
the lord of all.

Then did pale-eyed Athena
speak to her stern-hearted uncle
Poseidon, god of horse-ways:
'Remember the promise you made,
[and do not seek to save] Geryones from death.'

184 (S 7)
. . . his cowherd Eurytion, born of . . .
on the mainland, across from famed Erythea,
by the boundless silver-veined waters of Tarshish
river*
in a cave in the rock.

S 8 Over the waves of the salty deep they came
to the beautiful Isle of the Gods,
where the Hesperides have their golden houses.

S 13 (*Ceryones' parents appeal to him not to fight Heracles*)

'... my unhappy motherhood, unhappy fate.
Now I beg you, Geryones,
if ever I gave you my nipple

[She drew apart her fragrant robe . . .]

S 11

[With these words he] reached out . . .
He spoke in answ[er, the powerful son]
[of im]mortal [Chrysaor and Callirhoe:]
'Do not try to frighten me
[by speaking of icy de]ath,
and do not . . .
Perhaps my [lineage makes me immortal, un]aging,
[fit to live] in Olympus:
if so, better [to fight and avoid] reproach
[than to look on while the cattle]
[are pl]undered from my [stalls.]
Or if, dea[r father, all that's left]
[for me is] carrying on into old age
as one of those who live fr[om day to day,]
[cut off fr]om the blessed gods,
then now's the finest time to face my destiny
[and save you] and all our kin
from disgrace with men of the future [who tell]
of the son of Chrysaor—
may that not be the choice of the blessed gods.
. . . fight for my cattle . . .'

S 15

. . . debated in his mind
. . . to be best by far
to . . . and fight by stealth
against an enemy of such great might.
. . . he planned
a bitter end for him.
. . . held his shield before
. . . and from his head
. . . the horsehair plume
. . . upon the ground.

(13 lines lost)

(Heracles' arrow) bearing on its head
 a charge of horrid death,
 being besmeared with blood and . . . gall,
 the torments of the deadly Hydra's darting heads.
 In silent stealth he drove it in his brow,
 cleaving the flesh and bones
 by fortune's dispensation.
 Straight through to his skull-top the shaft kept
 course,
 and spoiled with crimson blood
 his cuirass and his gory limbs.
 Geryones bent his neck aslant
 even as a poppy whose delicate structure
 decays, and its petals soon fall.

185 (S 17)

As the mighty Sun-god stepped into his bowl
 of gold, to cross the river of World's End
 to the holy deeps of Night
 to his mother, his wedded wife, his dear children,
 the son of Zeus took his way*
 into the laurel-shaded grove.

181 (S 19)

Then Heracles took the goblet, a three-flagon
 measure,
 that Pholos* had mixed and served him,
 and drank with application.

Helen

187 They showered quinces on the king's wedding car,
 they showered myrtle leaves,
 rose-garlands, crinkled wreaths of violet.

188 A silverstone foot-basin.

*Palinodes**

193(a) Hither once more, song-loving goddess.

193(b) Gold-wingèd virgin Muse . . .

192 This tale they tell's not true:
 you did not sail in those benched ships
 or come to the towers of Troy.

*Eriphyle**

S 148 The warrior Adrastus
addressed him chidingly:
'Alcmaeon, whither away, leaving the banqueters
and this most excellent minstrel? Why
have you risen from your place?'

So he spoke, and the War-god's favourite,
Amphiaraus' son, replied:
'You stay, friend, drink, and keep your heart
cheerful in feasting; but I've a task

and . . . how his mother
harnessed a mule-cart and set off to Sicyon
to seek a bride for him,
. . . Anaxandros' daughter, of the line
of haughty . . .

The Sack of Troy

S 88 'To the temple, the citadel, hasten,
you Trojans and allied contingents,
come, let us not be persuaded to . . .
. . . uncouthly disfigure this . . . horse,
the goddess's holy adornment:
let us beware the Lady's heavy wrath,

So he spoke, and the Trojans . . .
considered how . . .
the great horse . . .

S 89 'But now by the waters of [fair-flowing] Simoës
we have been sorely befooled by a man
who by the grace of the goddess, august Athena,
knows the measures and skill . . .
[Trickery] instead of battle
and combat [will have] the great glory of
bringing
on Troy of the broad dancing-places
its day of captivity.'

S 105 . . . the Danaans eagerly sprang from the horse
. . . Poseidon the holy earth-rider [sent
tremors (?);]
Apollo [abided no longer in] holy [Ilios,]
nor Artemis, nor Aphrodite
. . . the Trojans' city Zeus . . .
. . . Trojans . . .

Returns of the Heroes

209* The lady Helen
[cried out] at the sudden sight of the heavenly
sign,
and these were her words to Odysseus' son:
'Telemachus, this is surely some messenger from
on high,
flown down through the fathomless air and gone
screeching away with the voice of killing death.
Even thus will Odysseus appear in your house
. . . by the will of Athena.
[But if you thin]k "this is but a chattering crow",
[set off for ho]me, I will not hold you here.
Penelope [will rejoice] to see you,
son of the man she loves.'

The Orestes saga

210 Join me, Muse, in rejecting stories of battle,
and celebrate weddings of gods and banquets of
men
and feasts of the blessed.
211 when the swallow in springtime rings out.
212 Such are the lovely-haired Graces' gifts to the
public
that we must sing, devising an elegant Phrygian
melody,
at the arrival of spring.

217 (*Apollo to Orestes*)
'I will give you this bow,*
informed by all my arts,
for victory in shooting.'

219* She dreamed a serpent came, with a bloody wound
on the crown of its head; and out of that
appeared a king of Pleisthenes' line.

*The Hunters of the Boar**

221 and buried its snout's tip beneath the ground.
222 . . . the sons of Thestios.

[Five of] the youngest, their parents' darlings,
[remain]ed at home, but the brave,
fleet-footed Procaon and Clytius went.
From Larisa came Eurytion,
the son of long-robed . . .
and the fierce son of Elatus

On one side sat the Locrian spearsmen
. . . the dear sons of . . .
trusty Achaeans . . . and proud . . .
and those who dwelt in Boeotia's holy acres;
while on the other side the Dryopes
and steadfast Aetolians . . .

*The Sons of Oedipus**

222b (Jocasta speaking)

'Do not add to my woes the burden of worry,
or raise grim prospects for my future life.

For the immortal gods
have not ordained for men on this holy earth
unchanging enmity for all their days,
no more than changeless love;
they set men's outlook for the day.

As to your prophecies, I pray the lord Apollo
will not fulfil them all;

but if I am destined to see
my sons slain by each other, if the Fates
have so dispensed, then may
death's ghastly close be mine straightway
before I can ever behold
the terrible moaning and tears of such woes,

my sons killed in the house
or the city fallen.

But come, dear sons, and hearken to my words.
Here's how I declare the outcome for you:
one to have the palace and live
by [the streams of Dirce], the other
to go hence, taking all your dear father's gold
and property—whichever of you two
draws the first lot by Destiny's design.

This, I think, should prove
the way to free you from an evil fate
as this godly seer foretells,
if truly Kronos' son [is to preserve]
King Cadmus' people and city, and put off
to later times whatever ill
is fated for our clan.'

So spoke the lady with appeasing words,
seeking to check her sons from combat in the
house,
and the seer Teiresias supported her.
They agreed to do . . .

(38 lines fragmentary)

. . . cattle and horses
. . . portion.

. . . what is destined to happen.

[Make your way to the house] of King Adrastus;
he will receive you, and give his lovely daughter
. . . and his people will give . . .

(12 lines fragmentary)

So spoke the famous [Teiresias], and at once
the hero

departed from the house.

[The finest captains] of Thebes [escorted]
Polynices their friend.

He went upon his way, passed through the mighty
wall

. . . with him . . .

[By the gods'] guidance they reached the Isthmus,
 the sea-[god's . . . with pr]ayers;
 Then [they passed] Corinth's fair settlements,
 and soon they came to [well-built] Cleonae.

From unidentified poems

223 because Tyndareos once,
 when making sacrifice to all the gods,
 forgot but one—the Cyprian who bestows
 such amiable blessings. She in wrath
 made his daughters twice- and thrice-marriers,
 deserters of their men.*

232 Truly, above all
 Apollo loves amusement, song and dance;
 grief and lament are Hades' affair.

233 Shining in armour the new-born Pallas sprang
 on to the broad earth.

235 Poseidon, the commander
 of hollow-hoof horses.

240 Come, hither, Calliope pure of voice.

243 And the slim javelins
 they hurled also.

244 For it is fruitless, it is helplessness,
 to weep for the dead.

245 When a man is dead,
 all favour he enjoyed is gone for nought.

250 O Muse who startest the dance . . .

P. Oxy. 3876 fr. 4
 . . . and addressed her:
 'Noble daughter of [Thestios,]*
 it is no enviable news
 you are about to receive in your halls.
 This day your brothers are untimely dead,
 slain by [your own dear son,]
 the doughty [Meleager.]'

Ibid. fr. 61-2

[They] ba[thed his body well]
[in warm water, and anointed it]
with unguent of nectar fragrance . . .
About him the cousin of Aeolus-Hippotades
wrapped a long robe, and laid him out on clean
fabrics. Then he concerned himself to build
a pyre for the dead man: long branches he
gathered,
and kindling . . .

Ibid. fr. 64b

. . . battle . . .
For a city is greatly en[hanced]
when God bestows blessings upon it:
there's no prestige or attainment for mortals
beyond the divine allocation. A very clear sign
. . . and of fighting . . .

Stesichorus

The Song of Geryon: this poem related one of the major exploits of Heracles, the capture of Geryon's cattle. Geryon or Geryones was a winged monster with three heads, six arms, and six legs, the son of Chrysaor and the nymph Callirhoe. He lived in the far west, on the island of Erythea (probably Cadiz).

184 *Tarshish river*: the Guadalquivir.

185 *the son of Zeus took his way*: to reach Erythea Heracles commandeered the golden bowl in which, according to some poets (cf. Mimnermus 12), the Sun travels at night round Oceanus, the river that encircles the earth, to get back to the east.

181 *Pholos*: a Centaur with whom Heracles stayed as he passed through the mountains of Arcadia. The smell of the wine, never previously opened, attracted other, aggressive Centaurs, whom Heracles had to drive away.

Palinodes: many authors mention a 'Palinode' of Stesichorus in which he retracted what he had previously related about Helen—the usual story that she had eloped to Troy with Paris—and presented a version in which the gods removed her to Egypt for the duration of the Trojan War and duped Paris and everyone else with a phantom Helen. It was said that the goddess Helen had struck Stesichorus blind because of his first account, which did her no credit, and that on composing the Palinode he recovered his sight. One source states that there were two separate Palinodes.

Eriphyle: the poem presumably related how Alcmaeon killed his mother Eriphyle to avenge his father, the seer Amphiaraus, whom she had compelled to take part in a war that he knew would bring his death. Adrastus was Eriphyle's brother.

209 This fragment comes from an account of Telemachus' visit to Sparta to seek news of his father, adapted from book 15 of the *Odyssey*.

217 *this bow*: it was given so that Orestes could defend himself against the Furies when they pursued him because of his murder of his mother.

219 The dream was Clytemnestra's. The serpent represents Agamem-

non, whom she killed (in one version) with an axe. The king that appeared 'out of that' (or perhaps 'after that') is presumably Orestes. Pleisthenes in some traditions replaced Atreus as Agamemnon's father. So the point may be that the legitimate king was to regain the throne from the usurper Aegisthus.

The Hunters of the Boar: heroes from many parts of Greece assembled to help Meleager hunt the mighty boar that the goddess Artemis sent to ravage the land of Calydon. The sons of Thestios were Meleager's uncles.

The Sons of Oedipus: Oedipus having laid curses upon his two sons Polynices and Eteocles, the seer Teiresias has prophesied to Jocasta that they will kill each other. She tries to prevent this by arranging that her sons should separate and rule Thebes in alternation. So Polynices departs. He went to Argos and there married the daughter of the king Adrastus. Later, when Eteocles proved unwilling to cede the Theban throne, Polynices tried with Adrastus' support to return and seize it by force. The two brothers duly killed one another in the battle.

223 *deserters of their men*: Tyndareos' three daughters were Timandra, who left her husband Echemos for another man; Clytemnestra, who was unfaithful to Agamemnon; and Helen, who deserted Menelaus when she sailed away with Paris.

P. Oxy. 3876 fr. 4 *daughter of Thestios*: Althaea. When the Calydonian Boar was killed, Meleager gave its hide to Atalanta, whom he fancied. His uncles, Althaea's brothers, took it away from her, and in a rage he killed them. The subject of the following fragment is obscure.